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ABSTRACT

Program evaluation from a K-12 perspective is increasing in importance. Unit school teachers expressed a necessity to objectively observe their schools. In 1980, the Board of Directors of the National Study of School Evaluation perceived the need for a K-12 self-study instrument. Consequently, the executive director of the board and a national advisory committee proceeded to develop the materials for the instrument. Suggestions were submitted so that the instrument would address specific demands. Twelve schools tested the instrument from 1981 to 1982. After the program, 70 percent of the participants responded to a questionnaire that would endeavor to determine if a K-12 self-study is more beneficial to the whole unit school and if the curriculum had more continuity as a consequence of a K-12 self-study. The results show that 73 percent of the respondents thought that the K-12 self-study was more beneficial, while 21 percent did not; 55 percent thought the curriculum exhibited more cohesiveness as a consequence of the self-study, while 27 percent thought it did not. A larger scale study is suggested to judge if the benefits to unit schools are long-range plans, short-term adjustments, or only the optimism of the program participants. Included are two tables and four references. (RG)

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K-12 Self Studies: Who Needs Them?

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to determine if a K-12 self study is of more benefit to the entire unit school than self studies done at each of the educational divisions and if the curriculum has more continuity as a result of a K-12 self study. A K-12 pilot study was conducted using the National Study of School Evaluation's unpublished K-12 School Evaluative Criteria. The results indicated that a K-12 self study rather than specific level (elementary, middle and high school) self studies was of more benefit to the unit schools. In addition, the participants in the study found that their schools' curriculums had more continuity as a result of a K-12 self study.

K-12 Self Studies: Who Needs Them?

School evaluation systems have traditionally relied on self study as the most important phase of the evaluation process. The self study is carried out by members of the faculty, staff, administration, student body, and community who are part of subcommittees that examine various elements in the school (NSSE, 1981). Self studies, for the most part, have been used by high schools and some middle schools and elementary schools to view only that particular level of the school system.

Of growing importance when evaluating school programs, however, is examining the educational framework on a Kindergarten through twelfth grade basis rather than as separate administrative divisions (elementary, middle, and high school levels). Strickland and Alexander (1969) suggest that teachers cooperatively construct the curriculum so that it follows a designated sequence with human development and skills development considered. Eible and Zaverella (1979) state, "all school districts have problems with curriculum coordination and this inevitable truth has caused educators everywhere to seek ways of solving the riddle of district-wide program management (p. 85).

Certainly, one might believe that unit schools (which house Kindergarten through twelfth grade) experience no such coordination and communications difficulties since they normally have a small enrollment and therefore, a small faculty. But when these researchers (Ramp and Manlove) talked with teachers at such schools, the teachers stated that this was not the case. They said they needed a way to take an objective, panoramic view of their school. Of course, this notion was not new. Even in 1929, administrators of elementary and high schools became concerned with smooth transition from the lower to the upper grades (Menacker, 1975); through the years the acceptance of this concept of evaluating the total K-12 program has become more and more prevalent as practical knowledge, experience, and professional training allow educators to agree that a continuous school program based on similar objectives and goals is of greater benefit to children than is a curriculum designed without such continuity.

Since 1933 the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) originally called the Cooperative Study of Secondary Schools Standards, has developed materials to aid the self study participants effectively view first

their high school and later their middle and elementary school programs. Unfortunately, the unit schools had not been afforded the convenience or benefit of a nationally developed instrument which spanned the entire educational spectrum. However, in 1980 after many requests were made, the Board of Directors of the NSSE determined that a K-12 instrument was necessary and in accordance with the decision Dr. Donald C. Manlove, Executive Director, set about to develop such materials. A National Advisory Committee was appointed to help develop the instrument. Some members served as consultants to the schools selected to participate in the field test of the instrument. The six regional accrediting associations were contacted and the development of the proposed instrument explained. These associations were requested to submit recommendations so that their specific needs would be reflected in the new instrument. Any available materials regarding K-12 guidelines were to be examined. The National Advisory Committee served as the writing team and was requested to draw heavily on other NSSE publications since these instruments had been field tested and used by numerous schools across the nation.

Twelve schools were selected from a list of schools

recommended by the six accrediting associations. These schools agreed to field test the new proto-typed materials. While initially the participants from these schools felt confident they could easily use the materials, upon delving into the self study, numerous questions began to arise. Despite the obvious advantages of examining a school's ability to articulate programs from Kindergarten through high school, educators undergoing self-examinations on such a scale revealed that problems definitely existed.

Why were conflicts arising during K-12 self studies at the chosen schools? One reason may have been that the theory behind a K-12 articulated curriculum was sound but the practicality of such a design was difficult to employ and therefore, embarrassing to evaluate. The evaluation process opens up for discussion what teachers normally do not have to discuss (e.g. the exact nature of their programs, weaknesses, etc.). This may have forced differences to surface and teachers to become contentious and argumentative. A second reason for conflict could have been inherent in the organizational structure itself. Since conflict is a "given" in any organizational structure, perhaps such conflict was

carried over into the evaluation process. A third reason could have been that the participants felt their examination of programs on a K-12 scale was in vain since such a study might not benefit the total school and the programs probably would not result in more continuity as an outcome of this major attempt.

Since personalities of personnel would certainly vary from school to school, to examine the "people problem" encountered while using this new instrument across thirteen grade levels would surely have rendered little benefit. Likewise, organizational conflict has and probably will always exist so to explore this avenue would probably have made little or no contribution to the educational field. Therefore, this study was an attempt to determine if a K-12 self study is of more benefit to the entire unit school (all three divisions -- elementary, middle and high school) and if the school curriculum had more continuity as a result of a K-12 self study.

During the 1981-82 school year the twelve pilot schools were involved in their K-12 self studies using the NSSE's proto-typed materials with eleven schools completing the pilot study. Upon completing their self

studies, participants were asked to answer a questionnaire. Two of the items from the questionnaire specifically examine the affects of a K-12 self study. The results represent a response rate of 70%. Since responses were anonymous, no individual follow-up communications could be made but an appeal was made to each steering committee chairman to encourage participants to return their questionnaires.

A K-12 Self Study Versus a Specific Level Self Study

The developers of the proposed instrument had the intention of meeting the needs of the K-12 school more succinctly via such an instrument. They also hoped a K-12 self study would benefit the entire school system. Therefore, the participants were asked to decide if a K-12 self study was of more benefit to the overall school district than a self study undertaken on a specific level would have been. Table 1 presents their responses.

Insert Table 1 about here

A total of 192 (73%) of the respondents found a K-12 self study to be of greater benefit than a specific level self study and 55 (21%) felt it was not of more benefit. Four (1%) of the respondents were undecided and 13 (5%) chose to make no comment. Indeed, there was strong

agreement among the participants that the entire district (which in all but one case was comprised of only one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school division) benefitted from such a comprehensive investigation.

In conjunction with the previous question, participants were asked if they felt the curriculum had more continuity due to the K-12 self study. Their responses are recorded in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

A majority of the respondents, 146 (55%), felt the curriculum did exemplify more continuity as a result of such a self study. Slightly over one fourth of the participants, 71 (27%), responded that the curriculum did not reflect more continuity as a result of the K-12 self study. Twenty three (9%) of the participants created their own "write in" responses indicating that they were undecided and 24 (9%) chose to make no comment.

Upon analyzing the motivation behind the many people who chose not to comment or who indicated that they were undecided, it became clear (by examining the written comments on the questionnaires and by similar responses in personal interviews with steering committee chairmen)

that numerous changes had not yet taken place but rather were in the planning stages. Therefore, these respondents decided to withhold judgment until such changes were implemented.

It would appear from these data that a K-12 self study provides the means for unit schools to systematically view their curriculum. It seems obvious, however, that appropriate changes may or may not be made as a result of the findings from such a study based on the faculty's and/or administration's willingness to make such changes. It is, therefore, recommended that a study take place on a larger scale to determine if indeed such benefits to a school are long range plans, short term adjustments, or only hopes and dreams of the self study participants.

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Table 1

Is Having A K-12 Self Study Rather Than A Specific Level Self Study More Beneficial to the School District?

Response	No. of Time Mentioned	Percent
Yes	192	73
No	55	21
Undecided	4	1
No Comment	13	5
Total	264	100

Table 2

Does the School Curriculum Have More Continuity

As A Result of the K-12 Self Study?

Response	No. of Times Mentioned	Percent
Yes	146	55
No	71	27
Undecided	23	9
No Comment	24	9
Total	264	100